3t Mukherjea O. Y-4, 8 (ca. 1933-1939) 1902
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SANTAL PARGANAS

796 Before we conclude, it may be interesting for
• 785 the reader to have some idea of the original Hook-
[K56] swinging festival, which has been declared now a criminal act by legislation, because of danger to human lives. Man in his *Sonthalia and the Sonthals*, gives a description which shows how the hooks for suspending the devotee were "inserted in the muscles of his back, who was generally an inebriated oracle. He was then suspended in mid-air and swung round, apparently hanging by the hooks. I have, however, seen a good many of these revolving martyrs, and although to a casual observer it appears very dreadful to behold a man thus pendant, it is not quite so bad so as it seems, for his friends took the precaution to tie a girth of strong cloth round the victim's body, in such a manner that his weight rests upon the cloth rather than on his muscles. The perforation of the flesh may cost him a few drops of blood, but that is all."

796 Not being an orthodox Santal festival, *Pata* is
184 observed only by some classes in Mayurbhanj, and does not belong essentially to the tribal calendar.

Conclusion

105 In the chapter on Santal economic life, we have seen their annual round of activities and seasonal occupations. Now, an agricultural population alone knows the variety of risks and dangers incidental to

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a portion of land in recognition of his appointment, and land cannot easily pass out of the possession of a particular clan. The office therefore tends to remain in the family, for fresh lands are not obtainable after one or two generations have passed away.

The villagers recognize the priest's office, as they do those of the other dignitaries, by payment in return for services rendered. When one of the villagers is fined by the council, the priest receives his own share of the total sum. When game is killed in the hunt, the priest's share consists of a strip of flesh cut from the animal's backbone; it is formed into the shape of a cooking-place before it is handed over to him. He receives the heads of all the animals that are sacrificed by him on behalf of his fellow villagers. His duty is to make the offerings to the tribal spirits on behalf of the whole village at the time of the festivals. In order to prepare himself he has to separate himself from his fellows. Santals ordinarily sleep on string beds, but on the night before a sacrifice the priest sleeps on the floor, and he must abstain from sexual intercourse. On the morrow he has to fast until his work is done.

In addition to the priest, there is in every village a co-priest with special functions. This official is known as the *kuḍam nacke*. The word *kuḍam* refers to the area behind the dwelling-house. During village festivals, while the priest is making the main offerings, the *kuḍam nacke* sacrifices to the *pargana boiga*, the spirit who is regarded as the guardian or perhaps as the personification of the wider territorial unit into which groups of Santal villages are formed. It may be that this particular spirit needs the services of the co-priest because the *pargana boiga* was resident in the area before the villagers settled within its borders, while they brought the other spirits with them. The other function fulfilled by the *kuḍam nacke* reveals ideas which comprise perhaps a separate strata in the complex structure of Santal religion. During the festivals he offers drops of blood, which he produces by pricking his own arm with a thorn, to the boundary spirits, or the spirits of the outskirts of the forests. The name of this blood offering is *bul mayam*, *mayam* being the ordinary word for blood. The meaning of the term *bul* in this context is obscure, and Santals are unable to offer any explanation. *Bul* is a word connoting drunkenness; it can also be used as an adjective to describe an earthen pot that has become saturated with water, and it may refer to the saturation of the rice offering with the blood. In some incantations the phrase is coupled with one that refers to menstrual blood. The same

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On the evening before the appointed day the village bailiff delivers the sacrificial hens, two white hens and one brown, to the priest's house. The priest observes his customary abstinence during that night, sleeping on the bare floor. Next morning the bailiff makes a collection of one hen from each house in the village, together with rice, salt and the various spices that are needed to cook a curry. It is the duty of the priest's wife to grind the flour that will be needed for "cakes"; his sister may perform this work only if she is unmarried. In the morning the priest constructs the sacred squares and circles on a piece of ground previously plastered with cowdung. The sacrifices are performed at noon, and these are in some cases offered in the sacred grove, but in some villages they are offered by the side of a stream or on the bank of one of the artificial lakes that abound. The sacred place is made from north to south, as in the case of the Flower festival, and the procedure is the same. First of all rice is sprinkled in the enclosures and some vermilion is placed on the rice. The birds are fed on the rice, water is sprinkled over them, and vermilion is smeared on their heads, their wings and their legs. When the sacrifice is complete, the priest eats the flesh of the heads, while the men of the village feast on a hash made from the rest of the flesh, and drink and sing.

The distinctive feature of the sacrifice is that, before the hens are offered, an egg is placed standing upright on a small pile of rice in one of the squares, and all the herdboys of the village are summoned to bring the cattle. The priest places vermilion on their goad sticks, and they drive their cattle across the enclosure in which the egg is standing until one of the cattle tramples upon and breaks the egg. This is the signal for an outburst of cheering and excitement. The cow or bull is garlanded and anointed with vermilion on its horns and its head. Sometimes the boy is carried shoulder high to the village headman, before whom he makes a deep obeisance, afterwards saluting the other men of the village. When the villagers return to the houses in the late afternoon they are supplied with beer in the priest's house, after which they visit the headman's house for the same purpose, and so on from one house to another. It is at this time that the youths and young women visit the home of the *jogmaajhi* and request him to turn a blind eye to their doings for the duration of the festival. The whole period is characterized by its freedom from traditional morality. The rules of avoidance are treated lightly, and many liberties are taken with members of the opposite sex.